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# Showing their pride

*OUTLaw back in the swing with gala awards dinner*

**T**he Law School's advocacy organization for gay and lesbian students has regrouped after a fallow period, and it came back strong with a festive and well-attended year-end dinner and award ceremony.

OUTLaw says its main goal is to "educate our colleagues about the legal issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity." More than 100 people turned out for the awards dinner, held April 5 at the historic Chef's Restaurant in downtown Buffalo.

"We're living history right now, and every little event counts," said the group's president, Daniel DeVoe '14, in welcoming the attendees – LGBTQ students, faculty and staff and their heterosexual allies.

The evening's keynote speaker, Associate Professor Michael Boucai, is researching legal cases concerning same-sex marriage, especially in the early 1970s – "those heady years after Stonewall when it seems the '60s really happened," he joked. He shared with the attendees some observations about those early legal forays into what has become, of course, a highly visible issue with two marriage equality cases currently under consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court.

There has been, for example, "bitter debate about whether to pursue same-sex marriage at all," Boucai said. Typical of the time, that debate was generally couched in the language of oppression and liberation; Boucai quoted one scholar as lamenting, "Since when is marriage the path to liberation?"

And marriage itself, he said, was not really the point of these early cases that pressed the issue. "When same-sex couples today apply for a marriage license, they do so primarily in order to be married," Boucai said. "But marriage itself was not a realistic goal for litigation in the 1970s." Instead, he said, a case would be said to have succeeded if the attendant publicity opened the public's eyes to the idea that same-sex couples should have their relationships ac-



New York State Assemblyman Sean Ryan, Daniel DeVoe '14 and Jorien Brock '03

knowledgeed and honored. One litigant, he said, put it this way: "We accomplished our goal. We got the whole world talking."

**O**UTLaw also recognized two honorees for their contributions to LGBTQ causes. The honorees were Jorien Brock '03, senior director of the Pride Center of Western New York, and Assemblyman Sean Ryan.

"My adult life has been focused on pursuing social justice and social change," Brock said. She talked about her work with the Pride Center, a one-stop resource for LGBTQ people in Buffalo, saying that the city's poverty, racial segregation and violent crime complicate the task of advocating for gay and lesbian persons.

"The things that have touched me," she said, "are those one-on-one moments," such as seeing a severely disabled young man come out of his shell during an Afro-Brazilian drumming program, or hearing a 65-year-old woman say that she "finally felt she could be true to herself and find her new community" after her parents passed away.

Ryan, who was elected to the Assembly in late 2011, co-sponsored the Gender Employment Non-Discrimination Act to protect the rights of transgender persons and also has advocated for anti-bullying legislation.

"We know times are changing," Ryan said. "We have groundbreaking rules in New York State which allow marriage equality, after a long, long fight. Whether the Supreme Court grants marriage equality almost doesn't make a difference, because we know the future. Whether it happens legislatively or judicially, the tide of progress is never held back."

His hope, he says, is that widespread adoption of same-sex marriage "sets a standard for normalcy. We hope that kids who come out in the future will not be treated as poorly, that their journey is made easier because they are coming into something that's accepted by society."

And Ryan challenged the lawyers-to-be in the audience to consider their role in society. "It's for you to decide what you are," he said. "Are you a gay American or an American person who is gay? You decide what comes first."